

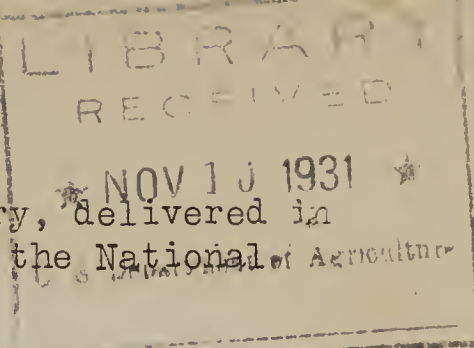
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THE GARDEN CALENDAR



A radio talk by W. R. Beattie, Bureau of Plant Industry, delivered in through station WRC and 44 other associate NBC stations, in the National Farm and Home Hour, Monday, November 2, 1931.

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At this season we get numerous inquiries about what to do with the tops of asparagus plants after the frost has killed them in the fall. If you have only a small patch of asparagus in your garden, we would advise you to cut the tops off close to the ground and burn them. Commercial asparagus growers very frequently drag down the tops after they are killed by frost and disk them into the soil along with weeds, or the remains of any cover crop like soy beans that may have been grown between the asparagus rows during the summer. This adds humus to the soil, and if the disk is run shallow it does not materially injure the crowns. Where you have an asparagus bed in the garden, of perhaps one hundred hills for a home supply, it is usually better to remove the tops and burn them because by so doing you will destroy any diseases that may be on the stems.

Another question that we are often asked is, will it pay me to grow asparagus for home use? That depends somewhat upon local conditions, but asparagus can be grown almost everywhere, and it furnishes one of the first green, succulent vegetables coming from our gardens in the spring. A properly planted bed will last many years if it is well fertilized each year after the cutting season is over.

Should the plants be set in the fall or in the spring? I would say that also depends upon local conditions, character of soil, winter temperatures, and to some extent upon when you will have the most time to do the work. As a rule, we recommend that the crowns be set in the spring as soon as the soil can be worked. In some parts of the South and in the Delta and Imperial Valley districts of California, where climatic conditions are favorable, the roots are set late in the fall or during the winter. Fall planting is necessary in some sections where heavy rains interfere with spring planting.

We generally recommend the planting of about 100 hills or crowns to supply an average family. One-year-old crowns are the most desirable, and only large, well grown crowns should be used. The plants are usually set about 24 or 30 inches apart in the rows and the rows 5 to 7 feet apart. For green asparagus 5 feet between rows is sufficient, but for the blanched asparagus the rows should be at least 7 feet apart to allow for hilling or mounding the soil over the rows. The crowns should never be allowed to dry out from the time they are dug from the nursery until they are finally planted.

If you should decide to start an asparagus bed, remember that this crop wants a deep, rich soil, preferably of a sandy or loamy nature, and that you are starting something that is a long-time proposition so make the ground rich, and prepare it deeply. It is not unusual to find asparagus beds in old gardens that have been providing families with plenty of fresh asparagus during the early springs of some forty to fifty years. We have the record of one bed near Hartford, Conn., that was in continuous production for over 100 years. The profitable production period for commercial plantings is considered to be 11 to 15 years, but a great deal depends on how the beds are planted and cared for.

Now, I am not going into detail regarding the planting and care of



asparagus, because that is all covered in Farmers' Bulletin No. 1-6-4-6 on Asparagus Culture, and in Farmers' Bulletin No. 1-2-4-2 on Permanent Fruit and Vegetable Gardens. Copies of these bulletins can be procured from the Department or through the station to which you are listening, that is, so long as the supply of these bulletins lasts.

Perhaps I should say just a word or two about the variety of asparagus to plant. The Washington rust-resistant strains, especially the Mary Washington, have been very largely planted during the past few years. There are three of these varieties or strains of asparagus - the Washington, the Martha Washington, and the Mary Washington. The Martha Washington is perhaps a little more resistant to rust, but the Mary Washington is slightly earlier and a very vigorous strain.

The cutting period varies in different locations, but on beds that are over four years old the cutting period lasts 45 to 60 days. The critical time for the asparagus plants is during the summer after cutting has ceased and the plants allowed to grow up. That is the time that they need plenty of fertilizer and cultivation, because it is during this summer-growing period that the energy that produces the next crop of spears is stored in the fleshy roots.

I hope I have anticipated some of the questions that may be in your minds regarding the production of asparagus, especially for home use. I have lived on about six different places during the past 25 or 30 years, and I have planted an asparagus bed on all but one and that was right in the city. I think we enjoy our early spring asparagus fully as much as anything we grow in our garden. The demand for both fresh and canned asparagus has increased greatly, but I would not advise you to go into commercial asparagus culture without first investigating every phase of the whole proposition from soil and climate to marketing, but I can assure you that nice tender asparagus right from your own garden in the early spring is mighty nice when you get it on your dinner plate with plenty of melted butter poured over it, or creamed asparagus on toast is not half bad when you are good and hungry. Let me repeat the number of the asparagus bulletin - it is Farmers' Bulletin No. 1-6-4-6.